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Nikolay Gogol. Viy

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*Viy is a colossal creation of folk imagination. This name is applied by people in Utile Russia to the chief of [he gnomes, whose eyelids teach to the ground. The whole story is a popular legend. I did not wish to change it in any way and tell it almost as simply as I heard it. (Author's note)

As soon as the booming seminary bell that hung by the gates of the Bratsky Monastery in Kiev rang out in the morning, crowds of schoolboys and seminarians' came hurrying from all over the city. Grammarians, rhetoricians, philosophers, and theologians, notebooks under their arms, trudged to class. The grammarians were still very small; as they walked they pushed each other and quarreled among themselves in the thinnest trebles; their clothes were almost all torn or dirty, and their pockets were eternally full of various sorts of trash, such as knucklebones, whistles made from feathers, unfinished pieces of pie, and occasionally even a little sparrow that, by chirping suddenly amidst the extraordinary silence of the classroom, would procure for its patron a decent beating on both hands, and sometimes the cherrywood rod. The rhetoricians walked more sedately: their clothes were often perfectly intact, but instead their faces were almost always adorned with some rhetorical trope: one eye completely closed, or a big bubble instead of a lip, or some other mark; these swore by God and talked among themselves in tenors. The philosophers dropped a whole octave lower: there was nothing in their pockets except strong, coarse tobacco. They kept nothing stashed away and ate whatever came along on the spot; the smell of pipes and vodka sometimes spread so far around them that a passing artisan would stand for a long time sniffing the air like a hound.

The marketplace at that time was usually just beginning to stir, and women with bagels, rolls, watermelon seeds, and poppyseed cakes tugged those who had them by their coattails of thin broadcloth or some sort of cotton.

"Young sirs! Young sirs! Here! Here!" they said on all sides. "There are good bagels, poppyseed cakes, twists, rolls! Fine ones, by God! with honey! homemade!"

Another woman, holding up something long made of twisted dough, cried:

"Here's an icicle, young sirs! Buy an icicle!"

"Don't buy anything from that one! Look how foul she is--her nose is awful and her hands are dirty . . ."

But they were afraid to pester the philosophers and theologians, because the philosophers and theologians liked to sample things, and always by the handful.

On reaching the seminary, the whole crowd settled by classes in low-ceilinged but rather spacious rooms with small windows, wide doors, and dirty desks. The classroom would suddenly be filled with the hum of many voices: the monitors listened to their charges, the ringing treble of a grammarian would fall in tune with the jingling of the windowpanes in the small windows, the glass echoing with almost the same sound; from the corner came the low buzz of a rhetorician whose mouth and thick lips ought to have belonged to philosophy at the least. He buzzed in 3 bass, and from afar all you heard was: boo, boo, boo, boo . . . The monitors, as they heard the lessons, looked with one eye under the desk, where a roll or dumpling or pumpkin seeds stuck out of their subordinate's pocket.

If all this learned crowd managed to come a little earlier, or if they knew that the professors would be later than usual, then, with universal agreement, a battle would be planned, and in this battle everyone had to take part, even the censors, whose duty was to look after the order and morals of all the student estate. Usually two theologians decided how the battle would go; whether each class should stand separately for itself, or they should divide themselves into two halves, the boarders and the seminary. In any case, it was the grammarians who would begin it first, but as soon as the rhetoricians mixed in, they would flee and stand on higher ground to watch the battle. Then philosophy with long black mustaches would step forth, and finally theology in terrible ballooning trousers and with the thickest necks. The usual end was that theology would beat them all, and philosophy, rubbing its sides, would be hustled into class, where it settled